

Seminaries are schools where women and men receive particular training for Christian ministry and, often, ordained ministry. These schools of higher education have a significant impact upon the church, for today's seminary student is tomorrow's church leader. It is important, therefore, that the church appreciate and support the seminaries and their students.

Ways the Church Can Recruit Seminarians

Many seminary students are first interested in becoming ministerial students while in a local church. They take Christianity more seriously because of the model of Christian faith and service of a church and its members. When people observe faithful pastoral leadership and faithful appreciation and support for that leadership, they are encouraged to consider becoming a church leader.

In addition to providing a loving Christian environment, local churches can assist the "recruitment" process by:

- Encouraging the pastor to lift up the seminaries and church-related vocations in sermons and church newsletters.
- Making money available to assist potential students not only with their seminary expenses, but also with their college and pre-seminary program of education.

- Taking field trips or summer outings that include visits to a seminary to let people know where the institutions are located, what they look like and why they exist.
- Inviting representatives from a seminary to speak at a Sunday service, teach a class, lead a retreat or be available for consultation with church members.
- Arranging visits to a seminary for potential students. If the pastor can take a student personally, it will mean a great deal more. The personal relationship between a pastor and a prospective student may make or break the decision as to whether such a student will enter seminary.
- Offering sincere words of encouragement and support to potential seminary students. Such support from the pastor and church members should not be pressure; however, potential students may need to be reinforced about the special gifts they have received from God and be encouraged to use them.
- Inviting interns or fieldwork assistants from seminaries working in your church to talk with potential seminarians.
- Recognizing a recent seminary graduate as a pastor who may bring a freshness and vitality to the gospel, thereby stimulating men and women in the church to consider this vocation.
- Celebrating Church Vocations Sunday. See the **UCC Desk**

Calendar and Plan Book for the designated date. Resources for the Sunday are available at ucc.org/worship/ways.

- Encouraging people, regardless of their age, to consider attending seminary.
- Supporting prospective students in your church who have indicated a desire to attend seminary. Pastoral and congregational celebration and support should be forthcoming. The church might wish to celebrate the decision during a worship service or an official church meeting. The official board also should initiate "in care" status for the student with a local association, and conference ministers should be notified. (See **Manual on Ministry**, produced by Parish Life and Leadership, for guidelines for the "in care" process. Contact your conference office or order from United Church of Christ Resources Telephone, toll-free, 800-537-3394). The material is also available at www.ucc.org/ministers/manual. The pastor and other church leaders should assist the student in every way possible in registration at the seminary.

Support at Seminary

While seminary communities are often more caring and compassionate than the college or university campus, there is need for encouragement from a home church. Students need to

know they are remembered and loved, and they usually enjoy learning what's happening back home. Family members and close friends will probably write or call and even visit the student if she or he is away from the area; however, it is especially encouraging when others in the local church reach out to the seminary student. If you don't have a student from your church at seminary, consider adopting a student and treating him or her like a student from your church. You may wish to consider a few specific ways to do this:

- Be sure the seminarian is on the mailing list for the church newsletter. You can also send church bulletins and special church announcements.
- Encourage individuals and groups within the church to send postcards (and even little gifts) on a regular schedule.
- Lift up the name of the seminarian during worship.
- Remember the seminarian regularly in public and private prayer.
- Support the seminarian, if at all possible, with financial assistance. If you cannot pay the tuition, consider paying for housing or for books.
- The pastor should make every effort to stay in frequent contact with the student.
- Make sure the association committee on the ministry

implements "in care" status and the seminarian has an advisor.

- Encourage the seminarian to stay in touch with your church. Read portions of a seminarian's letter in public worship.
- Have a photograph of the seminarian visible on a church bulletin board.
- When a seminarian is at home, use the person as liturgist or preacher in the service. At least give verbal recognition to the person as she or he worships in the sanctuary.
- Be supportive if problems arise. Do not condemn or ridicule a student who leaves the seminary.
- As graduation nears, celebrate the occasion and, if ordination is planned, participate in it.

Seminarians at Your Church

While your local church may not have a student in seminary, or potential seminarians, you can still be a significant resource for seminary students. One way this is done is by inviting students from a seminary to work at your church. Just as a medical student practices at a clinic or hospital prior to formal graduation, so seminary students need fieldwork experience in local churches.

One other most significant way to keep students for the ministry visible is for a church to declare itself to be a "teaching parish," making its resources available for seminary

students to learn in it. This learning takes three major forms: (1) fieldwork, (2) internship and (3) Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE). Churches located near seminaries frequently have students for a few hours a week of field work. Many churches offer a small stipend for an intern to come and work with them at a particular job for a year. Clinical Pastoral Education is a more structured method of learning which has developed in hospitals, mental hospitals and prisons over the past 50 years.

Those churches located near a seminary may wish to use seminarians on weekends or to help in special ways. Churches more distant from the seminary might consider calling a student to work for the summer months or on a year-long basis as an intern who would share in the total work of ministry with pastoral supervision. The seminary student learns much about practical theology, church organization and development by such experience.

Agreement about financial remuneration for such services should be made in advance. In a real way, a local church supports the seminary as well as the seminary student financially and educationally when such a working relationship is established. Supervision from the seminary (and usually from a local pastor as well) assures quality oversight and growth.

If calling a seminarian to work at your church is not practical, inviting such a person for a weekend, adopting a seminarian for a year or providing

regular financial support to the seminaries through the church budget are other ways you can provide for the ongoing education and support of all seminarians.

Issues Facing the Church

- Many seminarians today are women and older students. Is your church willing to be supportive of all students? Is your church open to seminarians of another race or a person with a disability?

Questions

- How does a church recruit people for ordained ministry?
- What are things your church is doing to support a seminarian now?
- Are there other things you can do?